The Black Cat

NOVEMBER 1904

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The Victory of the Conquered.*

BY ANNA McCLURE SHOLL.

THE rector sat in his study fingering some gold pieces, his interest in them seeming less an appreciation of their value than a child-like delight in their beauty. He was an old, unworldly man, enough of a mystic to see in the very gleam of gold a symbol of those supernal habitations for which he was patiently preparing the souls of his flock.

His wife and daughter were watching him. The daughter, Eleanor, had inherited her father's dreaming spirit, which surrounded her youthful beauty as if with a visible haze of soft ethereal rose. She sat at the table, her flower-like face propped in the strong, small hands, her hair like gold in the lamp-light, her dark eyes fixed with a brooding expression on the little yellow heap of money. In her white summer dress she looked even younger than her eighteen years.

And now began a conversation which in one form or another the girl had listened to periodically from her babyhood. Her mother recounted the needs of the household, her father the needs of St. James-the-less, the unusual name of the church whose square belfry a stone's throw away was now in silhouette against

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the last glow of a July sunset. Church and rectory were in a lonely situation in the country, the nearest house of the nearest village being more than half a mile distant.

The sound of a footstep on the porch drew the girl's attention from this amicable dispute concerning the disposition of the gold pieces. The open door of the study commanded a view of the entrance. But no one, apparently, was seeking to enter. She saw only the broad porch, and beyond it the tangled, old-fashioned garden, a mass of burnished color in the late, rich light.

Then she became aware of a darkening of that outer circle where the yellow glow of the lamp met the red glow reflected from the sunset sky. Raising her eyes, she saw, looking through one of the open windows, a figure which aroused in her a feeling less of fear than of astonishment. It was that of a young man of an appearance so picturesque that he immediately brought to her mind old romances, as the sight of a quaint sword might have done; and there was a suggestion of the sword in the keen, vivid features stamped with the look of inner warfare, or of some overwhelming experience in the grip of which he was still held. His face, ghastly white against the reddish gloom, was that of a gentleman with the passions of an outlaw. He was in riding dress, disordered to such a degree that it suggested flight on foot through thickets and along muddy roads. His dark eyes, singularly fixed in their gaze, were directed towards the pile of gold pieces.

Through her confused tumult of feeling, the young girl was conscious of relief that the intruder was, apparently, a gentleman, since his being one might make her course of action easier. He must be disposed of before her father and mother could be alarmed by his wild and threatening look, singularly blended with an expression of utter weariness.

She glanced from him to her parents. Their backs were half-turned from the window, and they were still absorbed in their friendly dispute over the money. She looked again towards the figure, as out of place in its setting of vine-wreathed Gothic window as a drinking-song in the pages of a missal, or a Don John among the donors of a Holy Family.

The man's eyes were now fixed upon her with an intense,

searching gaze. The leap and play of the sword was in that instant above her, threatening she knew not what. For a moment she was breathless under the wave of mortal cold that surged over her. Then the thought of shielding her parents brought back her courage.

"I am going into the garden to pick some roses, while you settle which coins are Cæsar's," she said, laughing and trying to speak naturally.

As she slipped out of her chair, she looked at the intruder, made a motion of her hand towards her parents, then laid a finger on her lips. As she did so the man bowed and left the window.

She drew a long breath of relief, though she was conscious that he might not be got rid of so easily. She took a few steps toward the door, then, hearing his step on the porch, she paused. Would he go down into the garden, vanish into the twilight from which he had mysteriously emerged, or would he enter?

Again the mortal cold swept over her, the anguish of suspense when a danger is almost escaped. A roaring in her ears drowned all other sounds.

The cheerful, familiar room took on the strange and black aspect of a prison. As in a confused dream she became aware at last that the man was standing in the doorway. His left hand was ceremoniously placed on his heart; his right, drooping listlessly, held a pistol.

"Who are you, sir? What do you want?"

Her father's voice, indignant, but not frightened, broke the silence in which it had seemed to her she had been living for æons.

"Charles — the pistol! — He has come to rob us!"

Her mother's words ended in a shriek of terror. The poetry of their rural isolation, with its element of sacredness lent by the rector's calling, was suddenly turned into a tragedy of solitary places where evil deeds may be done in safety. A defenceless old man, a weak woman and a girl were the sole occupants of the lonely rectory. Eleanor's imagination, kindled to fever-point by the sight of the pistol, was rapidly seizing upon ultimate horrors.

Suddenly a calm voice, with an ironical accent, broke in upon the surcharged atmosphere.

"Pardon me, madam, but I am a gentleman, and gentlemen do not rob."

A revulsion of feeling inspired the girl with fresh courage. Drawing herself to her full height she said:

"Neither do they enter houses unannounced, nor do they look in at windows."

The stranger smiled.

"To your first charge I answer that you should not leave your doors hospitably open. To your second, that I am not without a sense of the picturesque. Your charming family group, so expressive of the exempt life, was worth the price of a stolen glance, even though that price be the forfeiture of your fair favor."

He spoke with languid unconcern, with a note of weariness in his cultivated voice. His shapely fingers caressed the pistol.

The rector was now terrified. With a common thief or criminal he might have dealt, but a madman was master of the situation. That the intruder was out of his mind he had not the slightest doubt. His experience with men was narrow, limited to the types of his country parish. To him gentlemen kept always in their groove. Launched on the whirlwind of adventures they became something other than themselves. Poets he had never met, therefore he assigned strong passions only to the criminal or to the distraught.

The time-honored principle that to conquer a mad man you must humor him, now occurred to him.

"Don't be frightened," he whispered to his wife, who had sunk into her chair speechless and trembling, "I can deal with him." Then he advanced a few steps toward the stranger.

"You were quite right, dear sir, in yielding to your aesthetic instincts. This room has its picturesque features — at this hour its Rembrandt lights. May I inquire if you are stopping in the neighborhood?"

A grim smile overspread the young man's pallid face. He looked towards Eleanor, who was gazing at him as if fascinated.

"My dear young lady, your father thinks I am mad. Others have called me a genius, which is said to be the same thing. I may be desperate. I may be hungry. There are a hundred

synonyms for madness. That Michelangelo prophet over the mantel was probably called mad in his day — so was Wagner."

The girl met his gaze bravely.

"It is of no consequence to us what you are," she said in a firm voice; "the only thing that interests us is your immediate departure."

"Oh, Eleanor, don't anger him!"

Her mother's hysterical voice summoned up again in the girl all the conquered legions of her fears. Turning she said:

"Mother, it doesn't matter. We're at his mercy anyway."

The words held a cry to him, an appeal to what chivalry he might possess. In these last moments she had become conscious, by one of those strange intuitions which, when found in the very young, almost presuppose experience in a former incarnation, that this event was but the echo of preceding ones of great and terrible significance in a theatre of which they were ignorant. The stains and rents on the man's clothes were as nothing to the wounds of his soul. She divined that his mockery held self-terror.

"Yes, you are at my mercy," he assented, "as I was at the mercy of fate, but fate has played with me too long not to put me in the spirit of the game."

"Are you in need of money?" the rector asked, hoping to divert his attention. His growing terror of this visitor invested mere robbery with the commonplace light of high noon.

"No; I am not in need of money, but I am in need of a wife."

He fixed his brilliant sunken eyes on Eleanor with a look which seemed to claim her, to draw her hungrily to himself. The girl turned pale, and moved nearer her father. The young man raised the pistol.

"Don't move. The woman whom I am to marry must show confidence in me. What! — trembling? You do not seem to appreciate the compliment I am paying you. I have never before asked a woman to marry me, though I have been in love. I have not arrived at the age of twenty-five without — "

"Sir," the rector cried, "you can at least spare us such confidences."

The young man bowed as gracefully as when he saluted Eleanor from the porch.

"Do not be alarmed. Nothing Anacreonic would have passed my lips in the presence of your young daughter. I have not been in vain a student of the Morte d'Arthur. Your daughter brings to my mind a succession of fair ladies, Enid, Elaine, but not Vivien. One does not learn to be Vivien in a country rectory. Reverend sir, I repeat that I am in need of a wife. I ask your daughter's hand in marriage — at once."

Eleanor stood in frozen silence gazing at this man who had stepped thus fantastically into her life straight from the mysterious and the inexplicable. For some strange reason she no longer feared him. Hate, resentment, curiosity were in her breast, but not fear. Her dominant desire was to end, by any means, the theatric yet torturing scene, for the sake of her parents.

"My daughter's hand in marriage," the rector said, speaking slowly, as if in a dream. "What do you mean?"

"You are singularly obtuse for a man who has been performing marriage ceremonies for, I judge, many years. I mean just what I say."

A look of horror overspread the old man's face.

"That would be sacrilege. I would die first."

"Well, die then," the stranger answered, coolly. He raised the hand that held the pistol. Eleanor stepped in front of him.

"Kill me."

His hand dropped to his side.

"You cannot kill the brave — but you can marry — her. To call you wife once would be to go to my own death wreathed with invisible flowers — and the dead have need of flowers."

His voice, losing its mockery, became profoundly sad. The girl gazed at him with growing wonder, hating herself because, more and more, he became invested with a fantastic and inexplicable interest. Through all her horror of him as a criminal, her agony of resentment of him as the torturer of her parents, she was conscious of an unholy glamor about him, beside which the placid pictures of her life become pale and unreal, like shadowy altar frescoes. She closed her eyes against this scarlet glare as if it leaped from the pit. Steeling herself she answered:

"You speak of marrying me, as if I were a puppet. You cannot marry a girl without her consent."

"And you would not give yours?" he said, the old mockery again in his voice.

"You know I would not," she answered, calmly.

"You speak in the tone of one who has convictions, and convictions in love or religion retard spiritual development. Your father should be able to tell you how much theology has hampered the Christian faith — my dear sir," he broke off abruptly, covering the rector with his pistol, "do not move to the window. You can scarcely hope to make any one hear you. I will take the further precaution of drawing down the shade. Now, my dear young lady, will you tell me why you object to marrying me?"

"— a — man — I do not — know," she began, her voice shaken with an emotion which might have been anger or protest.

He smiled.

"Ah, if that is all, you would only be following the example of the majority of your sisters. How much do you think any of them know of a man before marrying him? How much did Madam your mother know of your father?"

A conscious flush overspread the pallor of Mrs. Leighton's face.

"How can you!" she cried, bursting into hysterical tears. "Oh, Charles, what is he?"

The visitor's sardonic laugh rang out harshly.

"I am not Mephisto, madam, though I have some intuition. Your daughter was about to tell me —?" he paused and looked at Eleanor. Anger suffused her. Her beauty at that moment was as a flower seen through white flame.

She caught up his words.

"— to tell you that I hate you, that I would die before I would marry you."

"Hate is only love that has missed the way, as Maeterlinck says — I suppose his books have not penetrated to these provinces. But it is not a question of your dying —" Again he raised the pistol, "you would prefer the death of your parents to marriage with me?"

"I will marry you," she cried, in a voice of bitter anguish.

"You really consent?" he said, with an assumption of deference that seemed to her the last cruelty.

"I consent to save them. I marry a coward. Father, get the book."

She seemed suddenly to have attained maturity, her childhood burned away in this passion of terror and pity. Her father gazed at her in agonized astonishment as if he scarcely recognized her.

"My child," he quavered, "I would rather die than commit this sacrilege."

"Get the book," she replied in a firm voice. "Mother, don't weep so. If he has a vestige of honor left he will go away afterwards. He would not take me away — a wife who did not love him!"

A shiver passed through the man's frame.

"I could not take you away, if I wished. A pistol may buy a wife, but not food."

"Why marry me then?" she said.

"To have a jest with fate who has jested with me."

"You are a coward — not a man. It will be hard to marry a coward."

"You are magnificent in your scorn, but only the ignorant are scornful. A man about to die is surely entitled to his jest."

"Are you about to die?"

"Probably."

The lines above her mouth hardened.

"Then I should recommend the burial, not the marriage, service."

He smiled.

"You have a sense of humor, a more goodly thing in a wife even than beauty — of which you possess your share. Come, stand up with me!"

Her father looked at her with anguished eyes.

"I cannot commit sacrilege, even to save life." The girl put her hands before her face, bowing her head. When she looked up again, her eyes seemed dilated by a far-off unutterable vision.

"Father," she said, speaking very slowly, "it will not be sacrilege. I — I consent."

"To save the lives of your parents!" was his answering cry. "I cannot do it, Eleanor."

She turned to the man at her side.

"Have you no mercy on them?"

"None. You must marry me before I leave this house."

"Will you promise to go then?"

"Yes."

"At once?"

"At once."

"And never return!"

"Your superlatives are indicative of your extreme youth. I may return to fetch you."

She looked at him proudly.

"A compulsory marriage gives you no such privilege."

"I will return then — when I have grown to love you."

She grew crimson — then again deathly pale.

"But you will surely go when this — mockery — is over."

"To me it is no mockery," he said, gently, "but I will go."

She turned.

"Father, we need delay no longer. I am ready." The old man came stumbling forward as one in a delirium of unreality. Suddenly he put down the book which he was holding and drew another from the shelves. Then in a distracted manner he faced his daughter and the stranger and began reading Latin.

The man interrupted him.

"Sir, that is an idyl of Theocritus, suitable for the honeymoon, but not binding as a marriage ceremony. Bring the prayer-book."

Ten minutes later the four affixed their signatures to a certificate, which the stranger afterwards folded carefully and put in a pocket.

Eleanor, as white as the marble monuments in the adjoining churchyard, raised her face to his.

"Now I have bought your departure. Go!"

He bowed before her.

"I have a parting request — that you will accompany me to the gate. A wife should bid her husband godspeed."

"No! no!" her mother cried, rushing forward. "Don't go with him a step beyond the door.

"Madam, I will not harm your daughter. I wish our leave-taking to be in private.

"I am not afraid," the girl said, wearily, "only go at once."

She followed him from the study, through the hall, across the porch and down into the garden, now flooded with the light of the

full moon. Its peace and beauty seemed even more unreal than the scene from which she had just come. She turned to her companion, almost expecting to see him fade away like the phantasmagoria of a delirium.

He was leaning heavily against a tree, his face pinched and sharply white in the moonlight. His bravado had dropped from him like a grotesquely embroidered cloak. His evident physical weakness made him seem more human and tangible, and a strange pity stirred within her, a pity for which she despised herself. She stood gazing at him, her dark eyes searching to read the riddle of his look.

"You are very beautiful," he said, with something of his old manner. "Have they mirrors in rectories? You see I 'm generous, even though you hate me. Do you know why I married you?"

"For your jest," she said, bitterly.

"It was not all jest. Well! You may soon be widowed. If I asked you to kiss me before I go, you would not do it, I suppose."

"No," she answered, drawing back, "I would not do it."

"Just now your prayers would be worth more to me," he said, gravely, "'and thou, if thou shouldst never see my face again, pray for my soul.'"

He left the tree and walked down the garden path, a peculiar feebleness in his gait, as of one half-starved or ill. She followed him. Suddenly he swayed and she rushed forward, putting a hand under his arm.

"Are you ill?" she cried.

"Devilishly faint. I 've eaten nothing since yesterday morning," he said, in a voice half angry, half ashamed.

"Wait! I 'll bring you food."

"No. I want nothing. I have you! If I could sit down a moment; I 've been on my feet for hours, days."

"Go into the vestibule of the church. A bench is there. You will find the door open. I will bring you food."

"Do not leave me, Eleanor," he said, uttering her name with an indescribable accent of mingled reverence and appeal which thrilled her.

"I will come back to you," she answered gently.

"Alone?"

"Of course alone. I am no traitor."

A few minutes later she stole across the churchyard bearing food. The anguish of fear returned upon her as she pushed open the church door, but through the dimness she saw a weary and seemingly helpless figure seated on a bench in the vestibule, the head resting against the stone wall, — a figure which again inspired her with reluctant pity.

"I have brought you wine and some bread."

He seemed not to hear her.

"I wish I could die now in the peace of this place," he said.

Scorn curved her lips.

"You are not fit to die. You have not learned how to live."

"That is true."

She had poured out a glass of wine, and he now raised it to his lips. Holding it there, he said:

"Do you ever wish to see me again?"

She was silent.

"Then I will not drink to our meeting."

When he had drained the glass he rose. He stood irresolute a moment, then pushed wide the swinging doors that opened into the church. For an instant there was a vision of a shadowy nave, of the long aisle leading to the remote altar under the east window, softly colored by the moonlight. Then a strong, young hand drew the doors together.

"You are not fit to go in there," she said, in a voice calm with authority.

He turned to her.

"No, I am not fit. Neither am I fit to kiss your lips, but I am human."

With a clasp which held in it no violence, but which she would have been powerless to resist, he drew her into his arms and, putting a hand in her bright hair, bent his face to hers, held his lips to her forehead in a long kiss. Then with something like a sob he released her, and strode from her into the night.

. . . . . .

"Is Mr. Barton coming for you?"

"Yes, at four. I had no excuses to offer."

"And if he speaks again — of this subject, as he surely will?"

"I will ward him off again."

Her father sighed.

"I cannot understand your inflexible silence about this matter, which surely was no disgrace, to you, but rather an act worthy of Antigone. The disgrace if any was mine. All my prayers will not efface it."

She looked at him with entreaty.

"How often I have begged you not to think of it as sacrilege."

"But your persistent silence almost makes it that," he said with a touch of impatience. "Let me tell Mr. Barton everything. He is a man of the world, and, devoted to you as he is, he would leave no stone unturned to find out whether that — that mockery was legally binding. Even if it were you could soon be released. You have been deserted for four years. We are not even sure that the name he gave was his own."

Eleanor turned sharply away and looked out of the window through which she had first seen the man the memory of whom dwelt with her in such undimmed keenness that sometimes she wondered whether that high-pitched hour had not been the whole of her real life. What she had gone through in that bizarre and strongly colored if hateful experience had at least furnished her with mental and spiritual food ever since. Love, life, religion — there was scarcely a region into which she could not carry, like a torch, his reckless, ironic words. Since his meteoric flash across her sky she had lived with him in a communion as fantastic as Elaine's in her aery tower.

The chain which bound her she was never conscious of except when her father pressed the claims of the man who within the past year had come into her life, an entirely amiable and worthy banker, who had fixed his country home near the rectory. He had already asked her to marry him. She had replied that she did not love him, her heart uplifted in thanksgiving that she did not. Through his asking of her hand she realized that the greatest dread of her life was that she might meet a man whom she would love. She felt herself wife, not so much to an individual as to a fantastic experience which would forever haunt

her until its meaning was explained. For months after that memorable evening she had watched the papers for some clue to the personality of the man whose kiss was her introduction to romance. Sometimes she forgave him because of it; often she hated him, but whatever her feeling she never for an hour forgot him.

Her greatest trial was her father's evident desire that she should marry that, as he said, he might die in peace, knowing her sheltered in a home whose walls would shut out forever distressing memories. Bound as she was to a grotesque phantom, she seemed to him robbed of the natural heritages of her young womanhood. He longed to break the silence which from the hour of the event she had imposed upon him. Her mother having died it was now known to but three persons, and that shadowy third person might never again trouble them.

"If Mr. Barton speaks to you to-day, will you promise me to accept him?" he urged. "We can then tell him all. Our greatest mistake was in not publishing the matter abroad at once."

"You know why I didn't wish that," she said in a low, broken voice. "It would have been salt on a wound."

"Ah, but the wound would have healed the quicker, and a scoundrel would have been brought to justice."

"I think he was brought to justice in this very room," she answered enigmatically, adding with a sigh, "He suffered."

Her father gazed at her in wonder. She looked beautiful and remote as she stood there. These four years had matured her, as if she had been absent on long journeys. There were hours when she was like a lady in a novel; again her old child-like simplicity seemed the whole of her.

They had no time for further conversation, for Mr. Barton was announced, and she went out into the summer sunshine with him.

Her father sat long in reverie. He had almost come to the point when he believed it his paternal duty to compel her to entrust Mr. Barton with the family secret, which, whatever it had been to Eleanor, was to him a skeleton rattling its bones in the watches of the night, or in solemn pauses of the church service. He felt that his salvation depended on a public confession of what he had done to save, as he believed, his life. He was a man made by temperament to live only with holy mysteries.

"A gentleman has asked to see you, sir. He's waiting in the parlor. Shall I show him in?"

The voice of the little maid-servant broke in upon his thoughts.

"Did he give his name, Martha?"

"No, sir. He didn't."

"Show him in."

The rector bent over his desk, arranging some papers that the summer breeze had scattered. When he looked up all the color left his face. The visitor might be a stranger, but something in his attitude as he stood in the doorway of the study recalled horribly an incident of a July evening four years before. There was the same careless grace, the same tentative pause before speaking, the same manner as of one used to the great world. The face, too, was startlingly like, but as if a clever, dashing charcoal sketch had been done into bronze. The lines held self-severity and firmness of purpose. The eyes, clear and direct in gaze, were grave.

"Whom have I the honor ——" the rector began, quaveringly.

Then the stranger spoke. There was no mistaking the clear, ironical voice, though now with its element of melancholy.

"Dr. Leighton, you are not honored by the reception of me. I am the Richard Marvin of the certificate. My real name is Edward Dale."

A convulsive shudder went through the old man's frame. Grasping an arm of the chair he leaned heavily against it, his breathing short, quick and labored.

The visitor's face grew very pale.

"Sit down, sir. I'll not detain you long."

The rector sank into a chair, motioning the man to a seat.

"Thank you, I am here but for a few moments. I will stand."

"I entreat you to sit down. Your standing recalls —" a sharp light of pain, vivifying the visitor's face, brought back to the rector cruel memories. He bowed his head in his hands.

The silence that ensued was broken at last by a low, quiet voice.

"I am come to release your daughter from any claim which she may have felt I had upon her. I am aware that she has a suitor, that she ——"

The rector's face had grown very hard.

"May I ask," he interrupted, "why you have not come before this to confess your crime, to release her from a bond which, however shadowy, was hateful to her? May I ask who and what you are? That you are a coward goes without saying."

The young man set his lips hard. The bronze look of the face returned, but on the powerfully modeled features was a strange aspect of patience.

"You have the right to ask," he said, slowly. "Though it might be that I wound up my account with cowardice on the night I outraged your household, but before I tell you what there is to be told, let me burn this. The sooner it is destroyed now the better."

He took from his pocket what the rector recognized from its shape as a marriage certificate. Crossing the room the young man laid it before him.

"I wish you to see, to be satisfied that it is the original document."

Dr. Leighton began to tremble. Glancing at it he nodded and waved it away. Edward Dale went to the fireplace, lit a match, and held it to the paper. In a moment a little heap of gray ashes fluttered down between the andirons. He took his chair again.

"Now I will tell you as well as I can the events which led up to that July night. I belong to the Dale family of ——" he mentioned the name of a city seventy miles distant. "My parents dying when I was very young, I was brought up in the home of my uncle and guardian, almost my only near relative, who being himself childless designed me for his heir — I am aware this sounds like the first act of a melodrama, but you can easily verify the facts — the name of my uncle is William Carleton."

Dr. Leighton started. He had often heard of the man as a wealthy and influential business man and philanthropist, but of his character he knew nothing. He grasped at the name, however, as the first straw floating on the current of mystery.

"My uncle and myself were predestined from the beginning of the world to clash. He was religious in a hard, biting fashion, I was a born questioner — if not a skeptic. He hated beauty — I wanted to be an artist. At every point we were in collision.

"Years of this friction produced the usual effect. I plunged into the wildest life I could go in debt for. I gambled, so to

speak, with my patrimony. When I was twenty-one, my uncle announced that I had completely squandered it. I brought against him the counter accusation of misusing and appropriating my inheritance. He turned me out of the house.

"I then invited the Devil to do his worst. There is little use of speaking of that period. Delirium is not a thing to be dwelt on when it is over. On the day I was twenty-five I forced myself into my uncle's presence to demand for the hundredth time what I believed was my due. We had a violent quarrel. In the heat of anger I struck him. He fell, stunned or dead I did not know, but I rushed from the room, believing myself a murderer. For two days I fled, keeping away from the country roads, hiding in the woods, tramping at night. I was half starved when I reached this place, the peace of which invited me, for I was sick and sore of soul. When I looked through your window here, I saw the quietest scene that in my troubled life I had ever beheld. I saw, too, a beautiful young girl whose first act when she discovered me was one of bravery. When she put her finger on her lips, motioning towards her parents, I knew that I was face to face with a heroic soul. Will it seem madness to you, when I tell you that in that instant I loved her, but with a wild desire not to be conquered, but to conquer in the only way left for me, an outcast. Fate had played with me. My life seemed nearly over. I would end it with a jest which would bind to me a soul worthy only of the noblest destinies. Your very peace aroused in me a hateful perversity. I resolved to shatter it, as I had been shattered.

"You know what happened. You may not know that she brought me food afterwards to the vestibule of the church. Into the church she would not let me go. She said I was not fit. Her words, 'I marry a coward,' rang in my ears all through that night. When the dawn came to me, wandering about the fields, I resolved that I would do the only thing left for me to do to lessen the sting of that word. I would give myself up.

"I went back to the city, to my uncle's house. He was alive, and very ill. For some reason of his own he had given it out that he had fallen in a faint, so I was received without suspicion. From the hour of my return he began to recover. We are in a sense reconciled, as far as two can be whose temperaments clash.

"I expected daily to be arrested for the outrage I had committed here. I searched the papers for some notice of what occurred.

"Your silence began to dwell with me as an accusation, as a beacon. I got down to hard work — to the study of the law — as a shield against despair. I lived continually with the memory of your daughter, and such a memory would purify any nature.

"I could not live without an occasional sight of her. I came here at intervals. More than once I have been in your congregation."

"Why did you not come to me before? Why have you prolonged her torture?" the rector interrupted harshly.

"I dared not come. I held an impossible hope — to come would have been to kill it. It is hard to kill your soul. It was my desire to make myself into a man in some degree less unworthy of her. Beyond that I dared not look. The appearance of Mr. Barton in her life forced me to — I struggled against giving up what I had stolen, but I — am here —" he paused, then, speaking slowly and heavily, continued, "the marriage is no marriage, but from any shadow of it she is forever released. My eternal silence is the only reparation I can make."

His voice had sunk almost to a whisper. The truth of his story was written in every line of his features.

The rector sat for a long time silent, his head bowed in his hands. At last he spoke slowly, and as if to himself: "Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord."

"You were born to peace, I to storm," the young man said, with a touch of his old bitterness. "I am punished in ways unknown to you, but if you desire a public — "

"No, no; you mistake me!" the rector cried. "Your confession to me is enough. She would desire nothing else. She, not I, preserved the silence of these years."

The visitor turned very pale, but he made no reply. Again the heavy stillness filled the room.

"Are you quite sure," the rector said at last, "that she is legally free?"

"I am quite sure. I will leave you my address and that of my uncle, should you wish to make further investigation. You will tell her, sir, that she is free?"

"I will tell her."

"Have you anything more to say to me, sir?"

The rector's professional manner returned to him.

"Nothing, I fear, that you would care to listen to. We speak different tongues. I can only thank the Providence that moved you to lift this terrible burden. You came at an opportune hour. She has refused to consider any — offer of marriage because of your — jest."

A spasm of pain contracted Edward Dale's features. He rose.

"I pray that she may be happy. I bid you farewell, sir."

The rector rose, hesitated a moment, then held out his hand.

"I bid you farewell, Mr. Dale. I wish you success in your profession." Then, as the young man turned away, the habit of years opened the rector's heart.

"I pray that you may have peace. You have come out of great tribulation."

A faint smile played for an instant about Dale's lips.

"Sir," he replied, "I go into great tribulation."

. . . . . .

The rector waited for Eleanor with an impatience which allowed him no rest. Yet something more than the wonder of her release was in his tumult of emotion as he paced up and down his study, up and down the porch, up and down the garden path. His return to the orderliness of life, his emancipation from all but legitimate mystery had elements of curiosity and a vague inexplicable regret. Though he would never have admitted it, the soul of this spiritual vagrant had inspired him with more interest than all the docile spirits of his flock who loved him and slept through his sermons. His prayer of thanksgiving for Eleanor was mingled with a prayer for the man who would no longer trouble her peace.

He saw her parting from Mr. Barton at the church gate and was conscious that it was not a hopeful sign. She came through the garden with a weary step. He went down to meet her, a tremulous eagerness in his manner.

"Eleanor, my child!"

Then she looked up and saw in his face the reflection of some extraordinary happening. At once her thoughts leaped to the man who was never wholly absent from her consciousness.

"He has been here!" she cried.

Her father gazed at her in astonishment.

"You have seen him?"

"I have seen no one but Mr. Barton, but you have seen him, I know! — I know!" She was trembling with excitement.

"I have seen him," he answered. Then, in broken, hurried phrases he told her all.

She listened to the end without interruption. She had ceased to tremble. Not a muscle of her face moved, but her eyes were fixed with an intensity of attention which made the telling of the story a difficult task. Her father wished she were less calm, less statue-like. When he had finished, she still remained silent.

"Do you realize it, Eleanor?" he said, imploringly. "You are free, free. He burned the certificate in the study fireplace. He has pledged his eternal silence."

"He — burned the certificate?" she repeated. The woe in her voice, the tragic look in her eyes frightened him, amazed him.

"Yes, he burned it. You are free."

"I do not know that I am free," she answered faintly.

"But you are, my child. You could marry to-morrow."

"I will never marry," she said in a breaking voice; then she hurried past him up the garden walk and into the house. He did not at once follow her, held in the grip of an incredible idea. He shook it off at last, and went to seek her, but at the door of his study he paused. She was crouched before the fireplace, touching with infinite gentleness the little gray ghosts of paper that fluttered there. He made no sign that he observed her, but stole away, amazed to ponder the matter which, despite this conclusive witness, still held its element of incredibility. Of such a normal solution of an abnormal occurrence he had never dreamed.

Half an hour's troubled thought brought him face to face with the inevitable. When he saw her cross the garden to the church, her whole figure in its drooping lines suggestive of sorrow, he went to his study and wrote out a telegram. Then from his table drawer he took a blank marriage certificate.

The Hypnotic Signs.*

BY EDGAR DAYTON PRICE.

IDICULOUS!" I exclaimed.

"Perfectly feasible," my seatmate assured me.

"To make pieces of tin convey auto-suggestions? — pish!"

"The easiest thing in the world," reiterated my seatmate.

The train was crawling along drearily through a mist that dimmed the landscape. I had wearied of the comic papers and the novel I had bought of the train boy, and had gone to the smoker to meditate and consume more cigars than was good for me. At a local station a short, stocky man and a gold-spectacled, whiskered individual got on, and the man with the spectacles sat down in my seat, breaking in on my meditations, while the stocky man sat down across the aisle and puffed absently at a clay pipe.

"My name is Boggs — Amos Boggs, M. D., Ph. D." said the intruder.

"Glad to know you, Doctor Boggs," I said, glad of the interruption.

"Travelling man?" he inquired, inquisitively.

"No, thank you," said I.

"I'm glad to know that," said the doctor, heartily. "Bad lot, travelling men, bad lot, clear through. Well, their day is passing, thanks to a little discovery of mine," he said, "I've originated a substitute for travelling men in the form of hypnotic signs which may be sent by mail and which will bring the orders every time. Bits of tin, they are, loaded with a hypnotic message."

"Ridiculous!" said I.

"Perfectly feasible," said the doctor, composedly, and proceeded to enlighten me about the hypnotic signs, after taking a pinch of

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snuff from a box which he produced from a pocket in his coat-tails.

"I have always been interested in hypnotism," he said, settling his spectacles more firmly on his nose. "I can hypnotize a little myself, and have used the art beneficially in my practice. The subject of influencing the human mind through inert agencies has been a matter of study and experiment with me for years, but I lacked the medium to convey the command to the plastic brain — the sensitive surface that should take the message and give it forth to the unwitting recipient.

"I had a theory that for years I had no chance to work out. It was that the medium lay in the human brain itself, in that part called the cerebellum or little brain, the organ of the sensory impressions. What I wanted was such a brain from a live, healthy man, which was naturally difficult to procure. Chance helped me one day, when there was a wreck on the railroad near me, and I was called professionally. Lying on the ties in the midst of the debris was the thing I had waited so long for — a splendid cerebellum freshly separated from its owner. You can imagine my joy and my impatience to prove the lurking theory, which, if it proved true, would send my name down the ages with those of Pasteur and Jenner as epoch-makers.

"Tremblingly I made an etherious emulsion of that precious brain," said the doctor. "Casting about for a vehicle to use it on, I found a piece of bright tin — the very thing. Then I was ready for a test, and placing the hypnotic sign before me, I concentrated my will and mentally printed a simple command on the little plate, which I then enclosed in an envelope, and, taking the precaution to have my housekeeper address it, sent it to the druggist who habitually put up my prescriptions.

"The command was for my friend to come up to my house and have a drink — not a complex message. Judge of my delight when the druggist appeared the next day, hypnotic sign in hand.

"'Here's a funny thing, Doc,' he said, 'this bit of tin without a mark or scratch on it came in the mail this morning. The thought occurred to me that you — say, Doc, what's the matter with having a little something hot?'

"There it was, come down to the office and have a little some-

thing hot — my very command," said the doctor, beaming through his spectacles. "What a confirmation of my hopes! I mixed my friend a good warm toddy and took one myself, and then told him of my wonderful discovery.

"'Bosh!' he said, promptly, 'It's a mere coincidence. If I wasn't in the habit of dropping in here and punishing your stock of Bourbon, I might think there was something in it.'

"Sure enough, he was a frequent caller and we usually imbibed. 'Perhaps it was a coincidence,' I admitted, 'suppose you take one of the plates and send a message to some one.'

"'Anything to oblige,' he said, and took the slip of tin and promised to follow directions. 'I'm going to collect a bad debt with it,' he said, chuckling. I heard nothing from him for a day or two and then he came to see me.

"'I almost believe that there's something in that discovery of yours, Doc,' he said, 'I — '

"'It worked,' I said, 'it worked!'

"'Yes, and no,' said the druggist. 'As you instructed me, I took the piece of tin home with me and concentrated a message on it to a colored man who had owed me $2.85 for five years. It seemed like rank foolishness, but I sent it off by mail with the command, "Come, Peter, pay up," mentally printed all over it, never expecting to see it again. But — '

"'Peter came,' I interrupted.

"'Yes, he did,' said my friend. 'Peter was scared and indignant. "Yo' druggist man," he said, "wha' fo' yo' send me dis yere piece ob tin fo' a hoodoo, wid yo' skull-an'-crossbones on de back ob de envelope? If Ah takes sick an' dies, Ah 'll see dat yo' hangs for hit, suah! Ah 'lows it 's dat $2.85 Ah owes yo'. Heah 's yo' money an' take dat hoodoo off right quick!"

"'Sure enough, there was a poison label stuck to the flap of the envelope; my clerk put it on, probably. I 'm afraid it was the fear of a hoodoo, and not your hypnotic scheme, that fetched Peter to the centre, Doc.'

"I 'm a tenacious man," said Doctor Boggs, glancing across the aisle at the stocky party, who appeared to be in a doze. "In spite of the doubt thrown on my discovery by my friend the druggist and his hoodoo theory, I knew it was the hypnotic sug-

gestion, and that alone, that had brought the darky to terms. Here were two cases which had worked per programme, the third should be highly conclusive. I made up my mind that an utter stranger was best to work with, and went down to the hotel and found my man in the person of a varnish drummer, a smart, alert fellow, to whom I outlined my discovery carefully. He was interested in a flash.

"'What a cinch to the varnish business,' he murmured. 'Nice little tin signs loaded with a corking strong hint to order goods, and no arguments; order comes back by return of mail! Got any of those tins about you? I 'll try them on my customers in this town. How do you load 'em?'

"This was the kind of coöperation I was looking for, and I gave the varnish man three sensitized plates and instructed him in their use. He scarcely ate his supper, he was so eager, and at once went to his room and, locking the door, sat down to the task of hypnotizing the signs. Unluckily, the house was full of travelling men, and a lot of them wanted my man for a game of poker, and went up to his room and pounded on the door. Pounding on a door is not conducive to concentration, and the varnish man, irritated, besought them to go away.

"'Clear out! Go climb a tree!' I heard him sing out above the din as the tattoo continued. 'I 'm busy and can't come. Go stand on your heads or jump into the river! Stop that infernal pounding!' They kept the hubbub going until he gave up in despair and let the hypnotic experiment go for the time being, and I went home.

"Now, my friend, you characterized my discovery as ridiculous," said the doctor, gleaming at me through his spectacles, and again taking snuff. "You shall see how ridiculous it was, in the outcome of this final experiment, for my emulsion was about gone. The varnish salesman was out bright and early the next morning among his customers, and the result of his first visit was a hurry call for me from a furniture factory, where the secretary, who did the buying, had been taken mysteriously ill.

"What 's the trouble?" I asked, in amazement, for the secretary was on the floor with the whole office force sitting on him, while he wriggled and besought them to let him up.

"'He 's crazy and wants to jump into the river,' they chorused. 'A varnish salesman was in to see him a few minutes ago, and handed him a tin business card; he looked at it and started for the river on a run, peeling his clothes off as he went.'

"'That 's right,' said the secretary, wriggling again, 'I want to jump into the river.'

"I turned sick as I recalled the remarks the varnish man had made the night before to the fellows hammering on his door. Here was hypnotic suggestion with a vengeance. I barred the way to the door, and snapped my fingers again and again under the secretary's nose. 'You 're all right, wake up!' I said, sharply. He pulled himself together, gazed at me stupidly, and then suddenly ejaculated, 'Well, I 'll be —'

"What he would be I had no opportunity to learn, for a frantic messenger came bursting in to summon me to the big organ factory, where the president and treasurer were acting strangely. I went on a run, meeting on my way the varnish man, who was heading for the depot at a lively gait. There was a crowd gathering at the organ factory, watching with curiosity the actions of the two men, as the president, an elderly man, gravely stood on his head as fast as kindly hands could reverse him to his natural attitude, and the secretary made the most grotesque efforts to climb a small sapling in front of the office. Each man held fast to a piece of tin, which told me the story.

"I had had the conclusive evidence that emulsion of cerebellum would carry auto-suggestions," said Doctor Boggs, wiping his brow, while a wild light gleamed in his eyes. "I had a terrible time stopping the president from standing on his head and the treasurer from shinning up the sapling, for, you see, the original commands had not come from me, but from the varnish salesman, who was miles away. Therein lay a drawback to the discovery, for it was a question of wills, and if the varnish man's will had been the stronger, they would have stood on their heads and climbed trees until the end of time. Luckily, my will prevailed."

"Wonderful!" I commented, for the doctor's story was done, and he was apparently waiting for something from me. "Have you taken any steps to put your discovery on a commercial basis?"

"Have you a strong will?" asked the doctor irrelevantly.

"Moderately strong," I said.

"Then I want your cerebellum!" roared the doctor, rising and making a clutch at my neck. In an instant the stocky man across the aisle was on him, and a pair of handcuffs were snapped on his wrists, and, foaming at the mouth, he was borne to the baggage car ahead, where his maniacal howls could be heard for some time.

"Mad!" I ejaculated, "Mad? Who would have thought it? And I was just going to give him an order for hypnotic signs."

"Knowest Thou That Land?"*

BY FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK AND WILL S. McGANN.

THE Prince had just come from the hospital, leaving behind his sympathy and good wishes, the grand cross of St. Stephanius, and his equerry to represent him at the bedside of the wounded man. The whole capital was already ringing with the news of the explosion and the heroism of the domestic who had risked, and probably lost, his life to save his Prince. To the group of eminent physicians that the Royal orders had summoned it was clear that neither the favor of kings nor the applause of the people could prolong the man's life for many hours.

He was quite conscious, however, and lay looking about him with one eye, for the other was covered by the enormous mass of bandages, and with a curiously anxious and alert expression in his glance. He had been a servant of the Household; he had the deformed hands of a peasant, but the eyes and brow of a gentleman. He seemed quite aware of his approaching end and, a little while after the Prince had gone, he asked that extreme unction might be administered to him, according to the rites of the Greek Church.

This had been already thought of, and a priest had been notified to be in readiness. In less than half an hour the procession arrived with the consecrated elements, marching through the clean, resounding corridors with a glitter of gold and silver, the fuming of incense and a subdued, melodious chanting. Confession, however, had to precede the sacrament, and the physicians in the ward turned to leave the priest alone in the room with the penitent, bowing low before the Host.

The patient, however, beckoned to the Prince's equerry and to the hospital house surgeon. He begged them to remain, to witness his confession. It was irregular; the priest hesitated and

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objected, but as the man insisted he decided that an exception might be made. The room was then cleared of all others; the sufferer was propped up with pillows, and the priest muttered the preliminary words, and was silent.

"There is no use in going into my early faults," began the dying man without any of the customary formulas of confession, and in an unexpectedly strong voice.

"I do not know that I shall have strength enough even for the things I particularly wish to say. My real name is of no concern to any one, either. I left it where I left my soul — in the mines. It might have been famous throughout Europe by now, for when I bore it I was a violinist, and I think that an audience or two in Vienna and Berlin may still remember my playing. But all that was twelve years ago.

"When I came home from the conservatory, full of success and in a fever of young enthusiasm for light and liberty, I became connected with a sort of secret association — oh, a very innocent one, but its object was the dissemination of literature and instruction which the police chose to consider seditious. There was a raid; a quantity of our papers were seized. Half a dozen of us were arrested, most of us students, and we went from prison to the salt mines. I spent four years there, by order of your Prince, and I left my music there underground, for the labor and the rheumatism crippled my fingers as you see them, so that I was never able to handle a bow again.

"The police do not seem to know that they make a dangerous animal of a man when they ruin his life. I was fifty years older when I came out, and not cowed, but only more cautious. When I joined a secret society next it was a really Revolutionary one, belonging to what was called the Department of Action. Its full affiliations and membership I never knew and would not tell you if I did, but I could if I chose give the police a good deal of light on a few affairs which they have found very puzzling.

"I made myself useful in a variety of ways to my comrades, and I even gained a certain reputation for skill and nerve, so that in our last attempt I was given the post of honor and of danger. For a long time we had recognized the Prince as a most dangerous enemy to the country's freedom, and when he published his last

edict — the one of last November — we decided that he had provoked his own fate. In solemn council it was determined that he should die.

"I was to be the agent, and I had invented my own instrument. I have never been quite able to get music out of my head, and this was a musical device to set off an explosive. The case containing the powder was fitted with a series of small steel wires, each tuned to a certain note. When these same notes were struck in the right order on a piano or any other instrument within hearing, the wires of my bomb of course vibrated sympathetically, one after another, each releasing a catch, till the last fired the cap. The merit of it was that it required no fuse, no electric wires, no personal management of any kind. It was the fancy of a musician, and I took a certain pleasure in making my lost art revenge itself thus.

"It was clear that our order commanded some influence at court, for I was taken into the Royal service upon my first application, and presently placed in attendance upon the Prince's apartments. For six weeks I lackied it, studying the ground and laying my plans so as to remove all possibility of failure.

"My bomb was in a small wooden box, containing half a pound of nitro-gelatin, along with the musical device. It was not hard to decide how the wires should be tuned. You all know the Prince's favorite piece of music, the one that is played to him most often, — a setting of Goethe's 'Kennst du das Land?' It indicates some taste, I admit, but it has sentimental associations for him. His fiancée, the present Princess, used to play it for him; she plays it to him yet. It was a love match, they say; and they say that she was at the piano when he proposed to her. The man must have a heart, after all. I hate such a character, — full of inconsistencies.

"So I tuned the wires of my bomb to a bar near the middle of the song. The phrase goes thus — I could never forget it" — and to the astonishment of the listeners the dying man hummed a few notes —

"But it took me some time to decide where to conceal the thing. I determined to put it near the grand piano in the Prince's private drawing-room. No one ever played there but himself or the Princess, and she never in his absence, so that I was sure of producing my effect. Just above the piano hung a very large boar's head mounted on an oaken base against the wall, and finally I took this down under the pretext that it required insect-powder, and carried it to my room. It was an easy matter to conceal my bomb inside the great skull. It fitted exactly, and I restored the trophy to its place above the piano.

"I kept a careful watch on that room for a couple of days, but it happened that neither of the Royal couple approached the piano. Then the Prince left the city for a week at his hunting-lodge, and returned only on the eve of his marriage anniversary, — that is, day before yesterday. I felt certain that 'Kennst du das Land?' would be played some time that day.

"By a lucky chance I was on duty in the hall yesterday evening. The Prince and the Princess came from dinner together, which was a rather unusual thing, and they entered his drawing-room. I approached the door and waited. There was no one else in sight in the great hall. Presently through the closed door I heard the piano opened, and the Princess, who is, I must say, no great performer, rattled through two or three Hungarian dances. There was another long silence. The door had not been tightly closed, and I pushed it an inch and peeped in. As I did so I heard the first bars of the expected song.

"The Prince was leaning over the piano to turn the music, smoking a cigarette and smiling at his wife. Not four feet from him hung the black boar's head. He looked very handsome and stately in evening dress.

"I ought to have made my own escape at once. I do not know what was the matter with me. My heart beat so as almost to drown the music. I had never seen any side of the Prince before but the rigid autocrat, and this unexpected domestic picture upset me. I could think only of the hideous wreck and destruction that another half minute must bring. I could just see the curve of the Princess's cheek as she looked up, saying something that I could not catch. I could not endure it. I lost my nerve. I forgot my

purpose; I forgot everything but the danger, and when the music was within half a dozen bars of the fatal phrase I opened the door.

"The piano stopped as I rushed in. The Prince stared at me, angry and amazed. I brushed past him, tore down the great head, and was back in the corridor almost before he could speak for wrath. I ran down the hall toward the balcony, intending to throw the bomb down into the garden.

"A blaze of light met me as I stepped out through the French window. The garden was full of torches. There was a roar of music from the lawn. The band of the Grenadier Guards was serenading the palace with the Prince's favorite air, chosen out of honor to the anniversary. In my excitement I held the bomb stupidly in my hands, and before I could drop it the orchestra crashed into the fatal phrase. A furnace seemed to burst up suddenly in my face, and then I knew nothing. I did not even hear the report.

"Next I found myself on this bed, and they told me I was a hero. But I knew that I was a vacillating coward, and, Father, I implore the absolution and forgiveness of the church — for my broken faith to my comrades, for my moment of weakness, for having spared a wicked life that I might have destroyed!"

The man glanced from one to another of his auditors with a half smile at their horror-stricken faces; and then the smile faded as if it had been wiped from his countenance. He tried to speak again, but failed. The surgeon picked up his wrist:

"It is the last rally. He will not be conscious again."

The uniformed equerry looked across at the priest, then at the physician.

"All this is under the seal of the confessional," he said. "The Prince must never know." And the other two men nodded.

So it happened that a brass tablet in the palace preserves the memory of the assassin who gave his life for his sovereign. And the band still plays "Knowest thou that Land?" sometimes in the gardens, but there are a few men in the city who do not care any more to hear that version of Goethe's world-famous song.

The Making of the Bobtail Flush.*

BY WILLIAM LISENBEE.

THERE was not a moment to lose. Barnard ran for our horses up the ravine, while I darted for the shed and brought out the saddles — superb fawn-colored "Fraziers" that cost us a hundred and forty dollars apiece in Denver; then into the ranch house to get our orders from Hadley.

He sat propped on his pillows, writing, with a feeble hand, the order on Stimson for the five thousand shares of the Bobtail Flush. He affixed his signature and pushed the paper toward me.

"You and Barnard get this to Stimson before Jessup reaches Bitter Junction," he said, "and I'll give you ten thousand dollars apiece!"

And Barnard and I were poor cow-punchers, working for sixty dollars a month!

I went out and watched Barnard racing toward the head of the ravine where our horses were picketed. There was not a man in Colorado who could have beaten Barnard in a mile race, yet he seemed to crawl.

Jim Kaylor, who had just ridden from the Bobtail Flush to bring the news of the big strike, came out and talked to me while I waited. By the door stood his exhausted horse with drooping head and heaving flanks.

"I never lost a minute on the whole twenty-mile stretch," he said, wiping the alkali dust from his face. "We all knew how Dick Hadley had stood by us, and we didn't intend to see him lose. When we were out of grub he fed us, and when we formed the Bobtail Flush into a stock company he took part of the shares and dropped seven thousand dollars in a hole that might never pay for the paper the shares were printed on. We haven't forgotten that. The big strike was made by the night shift last

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night, and when I came down to the mine this morning the whole outfit was plumb crazy. They had the assayer there and he had been working like a beaver. He had just finished when I reached the pump house. I wedged myself into the crowd and watched him take the little button from the pan of dross — a mere speck no bigger than a bird's eye. I saw him drop the fleck of yellow on the scales and then turn and figure on a piece of paper. Out of the twenty crowded in there not one moved a foot or spoke. There was not a thing about the plant stirring. The engineer had shut down the engine and stood behind me, wrench in hand, while the low hissing of escaping steam was all the sound that could be heard. Every man there had an interest in the mine, and when the assayer looked up from the paper we just filled our lungs with air and waited. 'Boys,' he says, holding the paper in his hand, 'I make it a trifle over thirty-seven hundred and forty-six dollars to the ton!'

"Then the crowd swayed back. I saw a hat sail upward; then the boys shouted till the board roof shook. The engineer, who could not do justice with his voice, turned on that prima donna whistle, and while it was prancing up and down the scale from lower G to high C, I slid out of the storm and ran for my horse. 'I'm going to take the news to Hadley,' I told them, as I swung into the saddle, 'Good Dick Hadley, that dropped his last dollar in this hole. I want to tell him that the Bobtail Flush is made,' and then the boys' wild cheering fell away under the soft pedal of distance as Black Joe took the road like a thunder-cloud.

"As I turned into the trail at the foot of the hill I glanced back and saw that Abe Stevens had slipped into the saddle and was racing after me like a house afire. I slackened pace and would have drawn rein but he signalled me to ride on as he came up. 'Don't stop,' he said. 'I'll ride with you a little way and tell you about it. You know Jessup who has been hanging around here looking at the mine? Well he's one of the crowd that's been figuring on buying Dick Hadley's shares since Dick got sick out on his ranch and was hard up and wanted to sell. Dick sent his shares over to Bitter Junction and left them there with Stimson to be sold. But the Jessup crowd held back and did not take them, thinking I guess that they might get them for a song in the

end. Jessup was here at the mine last night when the strike was made, and he cut the dust an hour ago for Bitter Junction and will nail Dick's shares if somebody doesn't beat him there. See Dick and have him send some one on a fresh horse to Bitter Junction with an order on Stimson for the mining stock. We must beat Jessup — the infernal scoundrel — if we have to leave a string of dead horses from here to Bitter Junction!' Then he reined in his horse and left me, and here I am and Jessup is still forty minutes ahead!"

I stood waiting with burning impatience for Barnard. I saw him racing toward the ranch house with our horses — Moses and Aaron — both range born and range bred, with every muscle, ligament and tissue in their bodies the product of the wild, free grasses of the foot-hills. They were a noble pair, and, with our saddles, all the capital we had in the wide, wide world.

Barnard came up like a whirlwind and slipped from the back of Aaron as he came. Our saddles were lifted simultaneously, and then with deft and skilled fingers we were tightening the girths. We were in our saddles at a breath, and Jim took off his broad-brimmed hat and cheered us as we galloped away. Our horses took the bits between their teeth and the sinuous trail played out behind us in a long line of alkali dust. The voice of Jim fell away as if the wind had caught it and flung it back in his face. Then, with the muffled thunder of pounding hoofs in the soft, yielding sand, our journey had begun — a journey that was to be a race from beginning to end.

Moses and Aaron took to the road caressingly. For days they had not felt the saddles, and they chafed at every touch of the rein with that superb disdain for restraint that is born of God's free air of the plains. Down into a wide basin we thundered; then up again till the end of a long slope brought us to the summit of the hill. And before us lay thirty miles of plain, a motionless, billowy sea of grass and sand, and at the end — Bitter Junction!

We rose in our stirrups and our eyes leaped along the narrow line that lay like a crinkled lariat across the plain. For a moment there was nothing visible but the shimmering light of the sun, lying in limpid pools between the hills of sand. But as we looked

a black spot danced against the waste of light and quickly took the shape of man and horse.

Barnard took off his hat, swung it about his head with a frenzied shout, and, tugging against the bits, Moses and Aaron took us thundering down the slope. But with burning impatience we held them in. There was many a weary mile to cover before we could crawl upon that blotch of black ahead, and our horses would need all their strength and endurance.

We watched the shadow on the trail and measured the distance with the practiced eye of the plainsman. A good six miles ahead yet, this we knew, but the polished lens of rarefied air mocked us with its tantalizing illusion, and it seemed as if a burst of speed and we would be upon him. Barnard's teeth were firmly set. We eased up on our reins and the trail slipped out behind like a living thing.

We kept our eyes fixed on Jessup. Barnard swore under his breath — in Spanish. But when he saw the smoke-like cloud of dust rise higher behind the man ahead and knew that he had seen us and was pushing forward with increased speed, he fell back to English. It was more satisfying.

We kept measuring the distance with our eyes — the miles that lay between us and the man ahead — and we thought of Dick Hadley lying helpless in his bed back at the ranch house — Dick who had dropped his last dollar in the Bobtail Flush. If we could only crawl upon that blotch of black on the trail ahead! It would mean the saving of Dick's fortune, and for Barnard and me — Ten Thousand apiece! And we were but poor cow-punchers, working for sixty dollars a month!

Barnard and I had gone through college together, and when the practical world had failed to see the commercial value of our Greek and logarithms, we shook the dust of the East from our feet and struck for the range. Here the athletic side of our training procured for us the necessaries of life, while our Greek philosophy softened the hard outlines of our experience.

Our last dollar went for Moses and Aaron and our saddles, but we never regretted it. "My kingdom for a horse!" Our horses were our constant companions — our friends — and we almost ate and slept with them. We loved them, and they repaid us in a

thousand ways with that blind obedience and dumb affection that is so often a reproof to the carping friendship of man.

"We will call them Moses and Aaron," said Barnard with a smile, "for some time they may carry us out of the desert. *Quien sabe?*" And now his words came back to me like the voice of prophecy.

We watched the little cloud of dust ahead with burning anxiety. We knew that we were crawling upon it foot by foot, but what weary miles of thirsty plain we must cover before we could close up the yawning gap that lay between.

There was not a cloud in the sky. Not a breath of wind moved the dust-laden stems of sage brush, and the palpitating heat rose like a thin smoke from the coppery disc of plain.

I leaned over and laid my hand gently on the mane of Moses and stroked him caressingly. He responded with a burst of speed that sent the air singing about my ears, but I held him in.

"Steady, steady," warned Barnard. "Our horses will need all their strength for the final dash, and that may be twenty miles away."

I tightened the rein, and neck and neck we swept on. The feet of our horses fell almost noiselessly in the soft, sandy soil, and the rhythmic beating of hoofs came in a muffled roll. Now gravel would fly hissing into the grass, and the whirling sand shot up in our wake and fell in a gentle shower, like a summer rain.

On, on! There was no time to stop for a breath. The loss of a minute might be fatal. It meant to us a small fortune, and to Dick — a half million!

The thought sent my mind in a dizzy whirl. Now across a level stretch of plain, now into a ravine we thundered, rising and sinking as we were tossed by the waves of a sea. Choked with dust, we did not speak, and in silence we saw the miles slip out behind, and foot by foot the gap between us and our goal narrowed.

We had made fifteen miles, and now Jessup was less than a mile ahead. Our horses were covered with foam and sweat, yet they tugged at the bits and showed no signs of fatigue. The air was palpitating with heat, and in the low depressions something flashed like limpid streams, but in all that stretch of plain there was not a drop of water. It was only the ghost of the vanished rivers —

that tantalizing illusion that has lured many a traveler across the desert to his death.

Jessup had already ridden thirty-five miles. We knew that his horse was almost spent. We should soon be upon him. Less than a mile now lay between, and we were eating that up a yard at a breath. A feeling of exultation swelled within me. I thought of Dick Hadley and what his joy would be when we should carry his shares in the Bobtail Flush back and lay them in his hand. Then came a vision of gold — the ten thousand Dick had promised each of us — and in the pleasing vision I saw Barnard and myself the owners of a ranch of our own, the rich meadows of the foot-hills, the grazing herds under the transparent blue of the Colorado skies.

A muttered imprecation from Barnard broke the spell. He flung his hand forward and as I looked ahead I saw another figure in the road — another horseman. He had met Jessup. I saw them both draw rein. In a moment they had changed horses and Jessup was galloping on — with a fresh horse, and Bitter Junction but ten miles away!

In a moment all my inspiring visions were swept away. A sudden sense of calamity overwhelmed me. My exultation died and I groaned inwardly. Barnard shut his teeth with a snap. There was an ominous glitter in his eye. He moved his hand toward his pistol involuntarily, then let it drop. I think he would have shot Jessup had he been in range.

"It is our only chance! Now or never!" As he uttered the words he slackened rein. I followed suit and our horses went forward like a flash. A gale seemed suddenly to spring up from ahead — a hot blast that swept us in the face like a breath of a furnace, and the muffled thunder of hoofs trailed off in a prolonged roar. I leaned forward and stroked the neck of Moses. My heart bled for him. Reeking with sweat, covered with foam and dust, he plunged humbly to the task, a slave to his master's will, and so he would go on till death should end the race, if I so willed it.

Far away a long streak of smoke trailed against the blue of the sky. It was the Limited Express, passing Bitter Junction. How I envied it its heart of fire and muscles of steel. Up a gentle

slope, and then we passed the man standing in the road by Jessup's winded horse. I should have liked to have struck him down where he stood, I felt so keenly the wrong he had unwittingly done us. He stood staring at us in silent wonder as we shot by.

Inch by inch and foot by foot we were gaining on Jessup, despite his fresh horse, but at what a cost! It was a killing pace for Moses and Aaron. They could not much longer stand the strain. Another mile and another, and still we were gaining. But I saw with a keen pang at my heart that Barnard's horse was failing. Nothing but muscles of steel could have long stood that strain.

On — on, down a gentle slope, then up a rise. Barnard's horse stumbled, swayed and dropped behind. A moan came from Barnard. "I am out of it, Donald," he said. "But Moses can yet win!" Then his voice was lost and I was riding alone!

There was no time to stop or think. I glanced back and saw that Barnard's horse was done, knew that he was out of the race and that the issue now rested with me — and Moses. He still plunged on as if he were made of iron, and slowly and surely he was closing up the gap between us and Jessup. Yet Jessup's horse was fresh. I ground my teeth in vengeful wrath, and pressed on.

Noble Moses! How bravely he kept to the task. Just as if he knew all that was at stake and would win if it cost him his life. Not five miles ahead lay Bitter Junction, but the gap between us and Jessup had dwindled to less than a quarter. "Brave Moses, just a little longer," I murmured, "a little longer and it will be over."

The trail made a turn to the left, and hoping to cut off some of the distance, I plunged across a narrow depression. Jessup saw my manœuvre and lashed his horse furiously. A burning joy thrilled me, and I felt that I should soon be upon him. But even as these thoughts swept through my brain there came a sudden shock and I was almost thrown from the saddle. Moses had stepped into a prairie dog-hole, and with a piteous whinny hobbled forward on three legs. A sudden sense of dreadful calamity assailed me. My poor horse made a desperate attempt to go on, but that fatal step had lamed him and the race was over.

I slipped from the saddle and put my arms about his neck, remorse and a crushing sense of defeat tugging at my heart.

"Good, noble Moses," I said. "It is not your fault. You did all you could, but we have lost together." I stood caressing him while he rubbed his foam-flecked nose against me in dumb show of affection.

It was all over. I was stunned and bewildered by the sudden sense of defeat. Barnard and I were beaten! We had lost a fortune, and Dick — good Dick Hadley, the Nestor of the range, had lost half a million! I could have cried out in my maddening anguish.

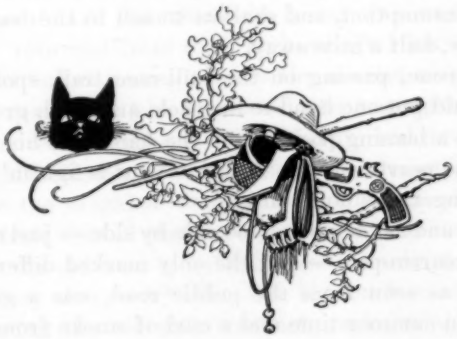
I could see Barnard coming on a half mile behind, and ahead, Jessup galloping swiftly toward Bitter Junction! I grew sick and dizzy. The glinting sun mocked me with its argent light, and the languid, sultry wind fanned the flame of fever in my brain.

I staggered on, leading my limping horse back to the trail, and there at the junction of the White Springs trail I stopped. As my eyes fell on the trail, a gray ribbon stretching away toward White Springs, something half concealed by a rise in the plain moved swiftly toward me. Not with the swinging gallop of the wolf, but with that steady sweep of the eagle. I watched it breathlessly. It rose swiftly; then something flecked with red and gold poked its nose over the rise, and with a long trail of white dust curling behind, an automobile came down the slope like the shadow of a flying cloud.

As I watched it a light leaped into my dazed senses and my heart into my mouth. I made a quick, frenzied signal. It came on with a grinding rush in a cloud of swirling sand and gravel and stopped. Through the storm I saw the face of Hatfield, an old college mate, who had been at the races at Pueblo, and I could have shouted out of sheer joy. I flung my hand toward Jessup, galloping a mile away. "Overtake him — get me to Bitter Junction ahead of him, for God's sake!" I cried, and then he half dragged me into the vehicle. "Watch me!" That was all he said. I fell down in the seat and laughed — laughed in a sort of hysterical transport of joy, while we shot out of the maelstrom of dust to the open road. For miles the road lay as level as a floor. There was no jar, no jolting — scarcely a sound; only an incessant

vibration, tremulous, soothing to the senses, with an almost indistinguishable hum like the droning of bees in the summer sun. We did not seem to move. The world was running beneath us. I lay back in the seat in a state of frenzied exultation. A bewildering intoxication confused my senses, and like one but half awake I looked ahead. Swifter and swifter and swifter the road flowed under us. Now the auto was transformed into a dragon. We were sitting there immovable while it was eating up the road a hundred yards at a gulp. The sinuous trail was leaping into its mouth, and about us the wind stormed and sent the dust in writhing tongues behind. And ahead Jessup was galloping, galloping, a black spot in a nebulous mass of dust — galloping grotesquely — not from us, but toward us, it seemed, tail foremost. He looked like a great toad hopping there in the dusty road. Then we were upon him. I half rose as we passed and shielded my face from the sharp edge of the wind. "Don't let me see you at the Junction," I called. I saw defeat in his dust-covered face as he tightened his rein. Then we left him struggling in a storm of dust behind.

I sank back in my seat, and there ahead lay Bitter Junction, with no living speck on its white, glittering trail!



"Ella Bet."*

BY W. F. MELTON.

HE always called her "Ella Bet" when speaking to her, and "She" when talking about her. She called him "Shaver" and spoke of him as "He." Their real names I never knew, as the neighbors always spoke of them as "The pore fo'ks 'at lives by the mill-race."

"Shaver" was tall and rawboned and stooped. He had a thin fringe of silken, white hair around the rim of a sleek, bald head. His beard was clipped from cheeks, chin and lips, but left on his neck. Beard and hair meeting, gave his head and face somewhat the appearance of a big egg in a bunch of Angora wool. He had what he called "Palsy," and his hands were always trembling.

"Ella Bet" was quite as old as he, but her hair was black. On her left elbow was a wen which made that arm look nearly twice as large as the other. She was unable to do much beyond telling fortunes, with keys and coffee grounds, for the village young folk who visited her on Sunday afternoons.

On the enclosed rocky half-acre, "Shaver" cultivated tobacco for home consumption, and shallots to sell to the boarding houses in the village, half a mile away.

When anyone, passing on the mill-race trail, spoke to the old man, he would put one hand to his back, and, with great effort, get himself into a leaning position, on the handle of his hoe, and say, "She's not so peart, an' the 'backer worms is fightin' my crap, but me an' the ingerns is doin' bully."

Their hut and ash-hopper stood side by side — just room between them for a martin-pole — and the only marked difference in their appearance, as seen from the public road, was a gourd vine on the hopper in summer time and a curl of smoke from the cabin in winter.

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Often they were seen together among the tobacco and shallots, she "weeding" with her right hand and he "chopping" near by. Many times he was heard to say, "'Ella Bet,' don' work ef it hurts ye; jis' havin' ye 'roun' is wo'th more'n all the 'backer worms c'n kill." She would reply, "Well, 'Shaver,' you know we don't want to be buried by the County, an' it'll take all we both c'n make an' save the balance of our days to put us away decent."

One day, while the old man was in town peddling shallots, a Gypsy who had heard of the old woman's success as a fortune teller, offered her sixteen dollars a month to make a trip to the South with his party, agreeing to bring her back home in two or three months.

At first she seemed frightened, but after much persuasion, and the assurance that they could not possibly make room for the old man, she said, "It nearly breaks my heart to do it, an' I know the lonesomeness'll hurt him, but I can make enough to put us away decent, an' he won't never haf to work so hard no more. The separation'll hurt me worser'n it will him, an' if I c'n stan' it for his sake, I guess he c'n stan' it for mine."

She climbed into the wagon and drove away, mopping the big tears from her sunken eyes. Only one neighbor, plowing in a field near by, saw her leave, and he was much surprised at what he considered faithlessness in the old woman. He went to his house immediately and reported the matter to his wife and suggested following and bringing her back, but his wife said, "No, let the old hag go, an' let the old man think she is lost, or something."

"Shaver" returned from town an hour after his wife left and, failing to find her at home, went to the nearest neighbor's to inquire. The very man who saw her leave accompanied him and called and hunted through the woods and up and down the creek. Several neighbors came in and the search was continued into the night. Once the neighbor thought he would tell what he knew, but he was afraid the old man could not stand it. He hinted at such a thing, but the old man trembled more than ever, and begged, "Don', don' say that — w'y man, she is allus been a angul."

Next morning the old man was sick, and for two weeks was confined to his bed, much of the time in a wild delirium; the

slightest noise about the cabin or the yard would startle him, and he would sit up in bed and ask, "Is that you, 'Ella Bet'?"

The neighbor decided that it would be an act of mercy to deceive the old man, and, confiding his secret to some friends, they made a nice mound, in a corner of the enclosure, and when the old man recovered, reported to him that his wife was found in the creek, a week after he missed her, and that they had given her a decent burial. He only replied, "I tol' ye she wuz a angul."

He hobbled out into the woods and dug up two small cedars, one of which he planted at the head of her grave, and the other where the head of his grave would be. Passers-by would often see him sitting by the mound, patting it gently and censuring himself for having stayed in town so long that day. At other times he would be hoeing among his plants and talking to the worms, "Please don' y'all kill off all my crap, f'r she ain' here to he'p me."

Ten weeks passed by, and one day, while the old man was in town, his wife returned. Finding the mound in the garden she supposed that he was dead, and she had just finished placing forty silver dollars upon it, in the shape of a cross, and sprinkling it with her tears, when the neighbor, who had seen her pass his house, climbed over the fence and told her the whole story, and came near scolding her for the way in which she had acted. She was amazed that anyone should ever have suspected her of deserting her husband. She said, "I knew he wouldn't a' let me go, an' it mighty nigh kilt me, but I done it to keep 'im f'm havin' to work so hard, an' so we wouldn't haf to be buried by the County."

A runner informed the old man and he was brought home in a wagon. His joy was so great that he could not walk. A quarter of a mile from home he began calling, "Ella Bet," and kept it up till she was in his arms.

Now, two well-grown cedars wave, where sleep two faithful hearts, where the mocking-birds talk of "Ella Bet" and "Shaver," and where the waters of the mill-race sing of love.

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